

Dear Michigan House of Representatives Elections and Ethics Committee,

My name is Sarah Streyder, and I am an active duty U.S. Air Force spouse. I am also the Founder and Director of the Secure Families Initiative – an organization committed to elevating military spouses and family members as voters and advocates for their communities.

We commend the Michigan Senate for passing this bill aimed at securely easing the voting process for military and overseas voters. We urge the Michigan House of Representatives to amend the bill to include military spouses and of-age children.

When military service members get stationed abroad, they're not the only ones – many are also accompanied by their families. Uprooting your family and transplanting yourself into a foreign culture can be a rewarding adventure, but it also comes with difficulties. Many families struggle with feelings of isolation from family and friends. It can take so long to learn the local customs and currency that by the time you've settled in, it's time to move again!

Voting in U.S. elections is a fundamental right for every U.S. citizen. But especially for overseas spouses, voting can also be a significant source of connection back home. It's a reminder of where we belong, and an affirmation that our input matters.

The perspectives of military spouses have not been included in this bill's deliberation to date, even though we face the exact same logistical barriers as our service members. If Michigan were to pass this legislation as written, they would join the 31 other states who already allow for electronic ballot submission – yet they would be the single state who omits spouses.

What kind of message does that send to the families who serve alongside their loved ones in uniform? Our voices do not matter any less.

Allowing for electronic ballot submission would lift a huge weight off our shoulders. When we move overseas, we already have to worry about finding work, picking the best school for our kids, and meeting our new doctor, often while bridging a language barrier. On top of all that, in order to vote we have the hassle of finding a post office, calculating proper postage, and keeping track of state-specific deadlines – all just to exercise our basic voting rights. Including us in this legislation would be a welcome acknowledgement of how we serve alongside our spouses.

Thank you for listening to voices from our community. We are invested in this issue and plan to continue relaying stories from our community to your offices.

Sincerely,

Sarah Streyder

Director of the Secure Families Initiative

